CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-SEVENTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on
Tuesday, 11 September 2001, at 10.15 a.m.

President: Mr. Roberto Betancourt Ruales (Ecuador)

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The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I declare open the 887th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. This will be an unusually extended meeting, since I have on my list of speakers for today the following representatives: Chile, Peru, Belgium, Argentina, Algeria, Norway, Canada, Mexico and the United Kingdom.

Before giving them the floor, however, I would like to remind you that, immediately following this plenary meeting, we shall hold an informal plenary to continue consideration of the draft annual report to the United Nations General Assembly.

I now give the floor to the representative of Chile, Minister Counsellor Alfredo Labbé, who will make his statement on behalf of the Ambassador, Mr. Juan Enrique Vega.

Mr. LABBE (Chile) (translated from Spanish): Thank you, Mr. President. I am pleased to take the floor at this meeting, so close to the end of the Conference's work for this year, to tell the member States and the observers that yesterday, Monday, 10 September, Chile deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations the instrument of ratification of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, also known as the Ottawa Convention. Chile has thus completed the process which, as everybody knows, is so lengthy and arduous of the domestic legal fine-tuning of an instrument of particular importance to Latin America and the world at large.

As we have said more than once before, the tensions among neighbours in our subregion in the 1970s and 1980s meant that Chile sowed thousands upon thousands of mines along its frontiers and those munitions were regarded as a decisive factor in the defence of our country. When today we look back on those decisions and the logic which underpinned them, we cannot but welcome the radical change brought about in South America with the restoration of democracy, which, in turn, has changed the security landscape in our hemisphere.

The democratic Governments in Latin America have shown themselves capable of resolving virtually all the boundary disputes that gave rise not only to tensions between and among neighbours but also, sadly, to armed conflicts and arms races that posed additional obstacles to the development of our region and to our maturity as committed, responsible players in the international community.

Thus, before highlighting our ratification, I wish to emphasize that we in Chile and our brothers in Latin America have abandoned this mindset of confrontation, the doctrine of the assumptions of dispute and conflict, that brought my country to lay the largest number of mines in South America.

In the light of the foregoing it must be said that, for Chile, ratifying this Convention was an enormous challenge. As a State which has never had, nor plans to have, weapons of mass destruction, participation in the debate on some issues and items on the disarmament agenda has been conducted from the standpoint of principle. Compliance with the Ottawa Convention, on the other hand, represents for us a real, practical challenge.

(Mr. Labbé, Chile)

To clear and destroy the vast quantity of mines that we sowed in the past has meant, first, exorcizing the geopolitical demons that prompted us to sow them in the first place. Henceforward, Chile will need economic resources no less vast in order to carry out the enormous physical task involved. We shall do what we can and we hope that, pursuant to article 6 of the Ottawa Convention, our friends will help us.

The simple ceremony to mark the deposit of our instrument of ratification was attended by our special guests, the Permanent Representatives of Canada and Norway to the United Nations at New York. In this way Chile wished to pay tribute and to acknowledge the two particularly friendly States whose political initiative and diplomatic skills had made the Ottawa Convention possible. We worked with them in the framework of the human security network, which also included Austria, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, the Netherlands, Slovenia, South Africa and observers Switzerland and Thailand, so as to place people, human beings of flesh and blood, at the very centre of multilateral action.

The Ottawa Convention can be held up as an alternative example of what is possible in terms of international security and disarmament when the political will is there. This instrument shows that medium-sized and small States can indeed generate the necessary critical mass to produce constructive results which positively affect the lives of millions of human beings. May this example serve to help us exorcize those forces that keep the Disarmament Conference paralysed.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of Chile for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

I now give the floor to the representative of Peru, Ambassador Jorge Voto-Bernales.

Mr. VOTO-BERNALES (Peru) (translated from Spanish): Thank you, Mr. President. Since this is the first time I am taking the floor under your presidency, may I convey my delegation's sincere appreciation for the way in which you have conducted the work of the Disarmament Conference, which is now drawing to the end of its 2001 session.

As everyone knows, my country is totally committed to the principles and purposes of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. Similarly, we are actively involved in the intersessional programme of work of the Convention, where Peru holds the joint chairmanship of the Standing Committee on Mine Clearance and Related Technologies.

In this connection, I am pleased to announce that, on Thursday, 13 September, Peru will have completed the destruction of the 321,368 anti-personnel mines that constituted the Peruvian arsenal of this type of weapon. The elimination of the last batch of 27,025 anti-personnel mines will take place the day after tomorrow.

The elimination of anti-personnel mines has been carried out in a continuous and transparent fashion over the last year. The operations to destroy the stockpiles of anti-personnel

(Mr. Voto-Bernales, Peru)

mines have been supported and verified by representatives of the international community, the United Nations, the Organization of American States (OAS), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and civil society. In this way, Peru will have fully complied with article 4 of the Ottawa Convention some one-and-a-half years before the four-year deadline.

My delegation is grateful to the members of the international community who have supported Peru in this endeavour. I am pleased to tell you that, with regard to its mine clearance obligations under the Convention, Peru has continued its efforts, as has Ecuador, to destroy as quickly as possible all existing anti-personnel mines in the frontier region shared by the two countries and to provide care for and ensure the social and economic integration of the victims of such weapons.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of Peru, Ambassador Bernales, for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

I now give the floor to the representative of Belgium, Ambassador Jean Lint.

Mr. LINT (Belgium) (translated from French): Mr. President, as Co-Chair of the Standing Committee of Experts on the General Status and Operation of the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Mines, I would like to thank my colleagues from Chile and Peru for their statements.

I note with great satisfaction the announcement of ratification by Chile, which, in six months, will become the one hundred and twentieth State party to the Convention. Chile is thus the thirty-fifth member State of the Conference on Disarmament to ratify or accede to the Convention. Six other members have signed but not yet ratified it; 25 member States of the Conference remain outside the Convention. This ratification, as my Chilean colleague has said, is of particular importance in the regional context of South America and also at the global level.

Since the Second Meeting of States Parties in Geneva in September 2000, five member States of the Conference have ratified the Convention, namely, Bangladesh, Chile, Colombia, Kenya and Romania, and I would like here to commend them for so doing. Two other members of the Conference - Algeria and Cameroon - have indicated they will soon deposit their instruments of ratification. It is my hope that Ethiopia will soon ratify as well, in view of Eritrea's accession to the Convention on 27 August 2001. Turkey has announced here in these halls that it will soon accede to the Convention, on the same date that it is ratified by Greece. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has stated that all the necessary steps have been taken for its accession in the near future.

Since the last meeting of the States parties, in Geneva, member States of the Conference on Disarmament have taken important steps to implement the Convention in full. Thus, Bulgaria, Malaysia, Slovakia, Spain and Zimbabwe have destroyed their stockpiles of anti-personnel landmines in compliance with article 4 of the Convention. They are among the 28 States which have completely destroyed their stockpiles. Nineteen other States are in the

(Mr. Lint, Belgium)

process of destroying their stockpiles and I would like to thank Peru for the information which it has just provided. Bulgaria, Malaysia and Zimbabwe have passed national legislation, including criminal penalties, in fulfilment of their obligations under article 9 of the Convention. Argentina, Brazil and Tunisia have submitted their first transparency report, as required by article 7 of the Convention.

To date, 120 States have ratified or acceded to the Convention and 141 States have either signed, ratified or acceded to it. Clearly, an international standard has been created, that is, the total prohibition of the production, stockpiling, use and transfer of anti-personnel landmines, and this standard is one that cannot be circumvented even by the non-signatory States. Indeed, since the entry into force of the Treaty, the trade in anti-personnel landmines has virtually ceased and production of these mines has been substantially reduced. There are no more than 14 producers left in the world.

Similarly, the number of victims in the worst affected countries has been steadily falling and, at the world level, increased financial assistance is being given each year by both signatory and non-signatory States for the purposes of mine clearance, assistance to victims and raising awareness of the dangers of mines. At the same time, much remains to be done and the entire international community must be involved.

Next week, the Third Meeting of States Parties will be held in Managua, Nicaragua. The presence of the largest number of States parties, signatories and non-signatories, will be of great importance in ensuring the success of the Convention. I invite all of you to attend that event, which will be held at the midway point to the Review Conference scheduled for 2004.

Tomorrow, the third annual report of the Landmine Monitor network will be officially presented at the global level by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL). The Landmine Monitor has become an essential reference document on the status of the Convention and the global situation as regards anti-personnel landmines.

Mr. President, universality is one of the fundamental objectives of the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-Personnel Landmines and, in this context, I encourage the 52 States which have not signed the Convention to accede to it as soon as possible. It is also important, however, that the Convention be implemented in full to rid the world of this inhuman weapon. I call upon all States, whether they be States parties, signatories or non-signatories, to desist from the use of anti-personnel landmines, in view of their impact on the lives of innocent civilians.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the Ambassador of Belgium for his important statement and also for his kind words addressed to the Chair.

The next speaker on my list is the representative of Argentina, Ambassador Horacio Solari.

Mr. SOLARI (Argentina) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, at the outset may I convey to you our most sincere congratulations on the manner in which you are conducting the work of the Conference on Disarmament and wish you every success as President.

Argentina fully subscribes to the purposes and thinking underlying the Ottawa Convention. It aspires to the goal of prohibiting anti-personnel landmines, since this is consistent with Argentine disarmament and arms limitation policy. This will enable us to restrict one type of weapon characterized by the particularly cruel and inhuman effects for its victims and by the indiscriminate nature of its consequences.

This aspiration of my country, which we share with the international community, is manifested in the conviction that we can make our region a mine-free zone and that this is an objective that can indeed be attained. The Declaration of MERCOSUR Bolivia and Chile, signed by the respective delegations of those countries on 30 July 1998, proclaims the region as a zone of peace, free of anti-personnel mines, and seeks to extend this status to the entire hemisphere in accordance with OAS resolutions on the subject.

Argentina views the Third Meeting of States Parties, to be held in Managua, Nicaragua, from 18 to 21 September this year, as a decisive step forward in the process leading to the effective implementation of the provisions, principles and purposes of the Convention, with a view to achieving humanitarian mine clearance and prohibiting such weapons throughout the world. The Managua meeting will be an excellent opportunity for sharing regional experience with regard to the destruction of existing stocks in the Americas and providing the technical and technological capacity and trained personnel in the region to accomplish this process.

Mr. President, we must remember that the entry into force of the Convention has given the international community a valuable legal instrument that is essential for strengthening the principles of humanitarian international law. The importance of the principles and purposes laid down in that instrument is reflected in the wide accession of a considerable number of countries, all of them committed to putting an end to the suffering and death caused by anti-personnel mines.

In this context, we express our full satisfaction with and welcome the recent ratification by the Republic of Chile of the Ottawa Convention, about which we have just heard, reflecting yet again the commitment to the process leading to the final elimination of anti-personnel mines from the region.

The growing number of ratifications of this instrument demonstrates that, far from compromising the security of States, the Ottawa Convention is a measure which fosters trust and confidence-building among countries. This has been made clear by the express undertaking given by the countries of the Rio Group before the Oslo meeting to be bound by its provisions and to see these as a guarantee of security for the Latin American region. We therefore support the interesting remarks made in this context by Chile.

(Mr. Solari, Argentina)

It is therefore essential that those countries which have still not signed the Convention do so as soon as possible so as to facilitate coordinated action by the international community to mitigate the indiscriminate consequences of the use of such weapons.

Argentina ratified this Convention on 14 September 1999 and has deposited its instrument of ratification and submitted the report required by article 7 of the Convention. Argentina's commitment to the principles and purposes enshrined in the Ottawa Convention is also reflected in the contribution that it makes to international cooperation in the area of humanitarian mine clearance.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of Argentina, Ambassador Horacio Solari, for his important statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

I now give the floor to the representative of Norway, Counsellor Langeland.

Mr. LANGELAND (Norway): Mr. President, since this is the first time that my delegation is taking the floor during your presidency, allow me to express our appreciation of the way you are guiding our deliberations.

I would also like to thank previous speakers for informing the Conference on Disarmament about the Third Meeting of the State Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, as well as progress in implementing and universalizing the Convention.

Norway attaches great importance to this Convention, which was negotiated in Oslo four years ago. Another illustration of our commitment to this Convention is the fact that Ambassador Kongstad of Norway was elected as President at the Second Meeting of State Parties and currently chairs the Coordination Committee. The main priority of the Norwegian presidency has been consolidation of the Ottawa process and full implementation of the various provisions under the Convention. To this end we maintain our commitment to allocate US$ 120 million to mine action over a five-year period.

Since the Convention entered into force more than two years ago, we have seen important progress. As Ambassador Lint has said, the universalization of the Convention is proceeding well. But 52 countries have neither signed nor ratified the Convention, and we fully agree with Ambassador Lint in encouraging these 52 countries to accede to the Treaty.

Other positive developments are: reduced use of anti-personnel mines, a dramatic drop in production, an almost complete halt in the trade and transfer of anti-personnel mines, increased destruction of stockpiled anti-personnel mines, increased funding for humanitarian mine action, including victim assistance, and most important, we are now seeing a significant decline in the number of new mine victims.

(Mr. Langeland, Norway)

This clearly illustrates that the Mine Ban Convention is becoming an international norm whose effect goes beyond the membership of the Convention. Despite such progress, however, we still face important challenges. There are strong indications of new use of anti-personnel mines in several conflicts. Despite an encouraging decrease in new mine victims, there are still thousands of new casualties from anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordinance (UXO). Thus, we are still facing a humanitarian emergency.

The Convention has achieved much in a short period of time, but much remains to be done.

At the upcoming Meeting of States Parties in Managua, we aim for a further strengthening of the Convention, through renewed commitment to its implementation. It is therefore vital to keep up the momentum for victim assistance, mine clearance, stockpile destruction and the general operation of the Convention, such as compliance. We also look forward to a positive decision with respect to improved support functions for the Convention.

The Ottawa process represents a unique partnership between mine-affected and other countries, between North and South, and between Governments and non-governmental organizations. The process continues to be a constructive, cooperative undertaking that positively supports a multilateral approach.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of Norway, Counsellor Langeland, for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

The next speaker on my list is the representative of Canada, Ambassador Christopher Westdal.

Mr. WESTDAL (Canada): I hasten to use this, my first chance, to congratulate you on your conduct of the presidency. You have been dealt a pretty hopeless hand, of course, but you are playing it well, with characteristic Ecuadorian poise and panache.

I want to begin by joining those who have welcomed Chile's important ratification of the Ottawa Convention. We are heartened by the growing number of countries committed to the elimination of landmines.

Mr. President, I also join those welcoming the forthcoming release of the 2001 edition of the Landmine Monitor report. Canada has been contributing to the Landmine Monitor for several years. We congratulate ICBL for this comprehensive annual report, which promotes effective implementation and full compliance with the Convention. It is a credible, independent source of information, complementing the Convention's State reporting requirements.

Last year's report gave us lots of good news. We have been encouraged by the dramatic drop in the production of anti-personnel mines, by a major decline in the use of these weapons in

(Mr. Westdal, Canada)

recent years, despite some unfortunate exceptions, and by an almost complete halt to their international trade. Millions of mines have been destroyed by more than 50 countries and, thanks to concerted international efforts to clear mined land, mine-affected communities in every region of the world are becoming free of landmines. These are very welcome developments and we hope that the coming report will tell of more such progress.

Unfortunately, we cannot ignore the continued use of anti-personnel landmines in some regions of the world. Canada deplores their continued use. We will keep working with other States in the Convention's tradition of cooperation to get the Convention accepted and implemented by everyone, everywhere.

I would not want to close without applauding the great work that Ambassador Lint of Belgium and Mr. Brighton Mugarisanwa of Zimbabwe have done this last year, serving as Co-Chairs of the Standing Committee of Experts on the Status and Operation of the Convention. I believe as well that Ambassador Kongstad of Norway, who served the past year as President of the Convention, deserves comparable praise and gratitude, and I would ask his compatriots here to convey these to him in Oslo.

Mr. President, at a time when the security contribution of multilateral arms control and disarmament forums, institutions, agreements and programmes is being doubted, questioned and challenged in key circles, it is deeply encouraging to bear witness to our continued, incontestible, multilateral progress against anti-personnel landmines.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of Canada for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

I now give the floor to the representative of Algeria, Ms. Baghli.

Ms. BAGHLI (Algeria) (translated from French): Mr. President, first of all, on behalf of my delegation, allow me to congratulate you on your accession to the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament and to commend you on the way in which you have been conducting our proceedings.

Mr. President, like previous speakers, I would like to stress the importance of the Ottawa Convention on Anti-Personnel Landmines, prohibiting the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines, which sadly continue to claim many victims around the world. Our country was fully aware of the importance and the scope of this most welcome instrument, which undertakes to ban the use of those destructive weapons and establish an appropriate framework for international cooperation in combating this scourge, and it warmly welcomed the preparatory process for the Convention and was one of the first to sign it. Motivated by the concern which we have always had for the danger represented by anti-personnel landmines, Algeria has just ratified the Convention and we are now preparing to deposit the instruments of ratification with the appropriate authorities.

(Ms. Baghli, Algeria)

Although we have not often appeared on the lists of countries affected by mines, Algeria has suffered badly from these weapons, dating, for the most part, from the colonial period. The mines in question were laid by colonial forces in violation of the most elementary rules of human rights, with a view to hindering the Algerian people's struggle for independence. Those mines still claim victims today. These victims have a right to compensation and reparations from those responsible for laying the mines. Since the advent of independence, the services of the People's National Army have conducted mine-clearance operations but these efforts remain insufficient because of the lack of appropriate training and necessary resources. While initial estimates put the number of those mines at between 2 and 3 million, some estimates put forward much higher figures.

My delegation would also like to take this opportunity to pay well-deserved tribute to the non-governmental organizations which contributed so extensively to the successful conclusion of the Ottawa process. Their determination and their perseverance in this regard were exemplary. That determination was not confined to that task, however, and these organizations are now demonstrating the same determination and the same commitment in contributing to the implementation of the Ottawa Convention and in providing valuable assistance to the populations affected by mines.

In this regard the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) in 1997 was well deserved. The commitment and accomplishments demonstrated by non-governmental organizations in the area of disarmament have persuaded Algeria to request the participation of these organizations in the proceedings of the Conference of Disarmament as observers.

Since the signing of the Ottawa Convention much has been done to help the countries affected by those destructive weapons in accordance with the provisions of the Convention. Recognition must be given here to the donor countries which provided the necessary funds to help those countries affected by mines. We must salute this example of international cooperation and solidarity, given that the presence of anti-personnel landmines considerably hinders the economic development of the regions affected, not to mention, of course, the many victims which they claim, long after the end of a conflict or source of tension.

I must also pay tribute to the role played by organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, the relevant agencies of the United Nations and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, for their commitment to implementing the Ottawa Convention and in particular the outstanding work that they have been doing in raising awareness of the dangers posed by landmines.

On the eve of the Third Meeting of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, scheduled for 18-21 September 2001 in Managua, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to wish the participants in that meeting every success in their work and to appeal for the universalization

(Ms. Baghli, Algeria)

of the Convention, so that our planet may be delivered from the scourge of anti-personnel landmines. As for my country, under the terms of its ratification of the Ottawa Convention, we undertake to comply fully with its provisions and to cooperate with a view to its full implementation.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the representative of Algeria for her statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

The next speaker on my list is the representative of Mexico, Mr. Romero.

Mr. ROMERO (Mexico) (translated from Spanish): Mr. President, may I begin by congratulating you on the enlightened and skilful way in which you have been conducting the work of our Conference. The statements we have just heard, particularly those by our sister delegations of Chile and Peru, strengthen our conviction that the Ottawa Convention on Anti-Personnel Landmines has been able, in a very short time, to establish an incontestable international standard under which anti-personnel landmines are quite unacceptable. The accession of 120 countries to the Ottawa Convention, together with Chile's deposit of its instrument of ratification yesterday, is irrefutable evidence that the total eradication of anti-personnel landmines is a realistic goal for the international community.

Thanks to the political will that has been shown since the Convention entered into force, not only has Peru taken up the Managua Challenge and eliminated its stockpile of anti-personnel landmines but other countries in the Latin American region that have been severely affected by these arms have also been able to make progress in mine clearance and the destruction of stockpiles, so as to meet the deadlines laid down in the Convention. The impact which this has had for the effective implementation of the Ottawa Convention has been reflected in the drastic reduction in the number of countries producing mines, in the declining number of exports of such weapons, in the wide-ranging destruction of stockpiles, as illustrated by Peru, by my own country, by Ecuador and by Nicaragua, in the considerable decline in the number of victims and in the increase in the funds provided for mine-clearance programmes and activities. The results of these processes may be seen in the rehabilitation and reintegration of victims into society and the relief afforded to the affected populations, which are now starting to restore their community life. It is now up to the States parties to the Convention and to organized civil society to maintain these efforts and to ensure that the total prohibition on anti-personnel mines is applied in practice and supported by the necessary international cooperation for the effective implementation of the Convention. Mexico considers that universality is one of the essential targets of the Ottawa Convention, and consequently urges the 52 States that have still not done so to accede as quickly as possible to the Convention.

Mr. President, next week in Managua the States parties to the Convention will have a fresh opportunity to discuss its modus operandi and to continue their endeavours to make it a universal convention. Since this is the first time that a meeting of the States parties is being held on the American continent we are certain that it will give us fresh impetus to work towards our goal of a western hemisphere free of anti-personnel mines.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the distinguished representative of Mexico for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

Before calling on the next speaker, indeed the last speaker on my list for today, Ambassador Ian Soutar of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, I wish to inform you that Ambassador Soutar will soon be leaving the Disarmament Conference, since the authorities in his country have assigned him to other important duties.

Ambassador Soutar joined us on 18 August 1997 in circumstances where the Conference, after struggling with its agenda for an entire session, was about to start drafting its annual report, marking one of the most difficult episodes in its history. It was undoubtedly this exposure to the complexities of our work, which, combined with his thorough knowledge of the issues and limitation of arms and disarmament, that enabled him to lead the Conference successfully in drafting its report the following year, when he himself was President of the Conference, an office which he discharged with consummate diplomatic skill. Ambassador Soutar has represented his country with courage and authority, with distinction and elegance. He has also taken an active part in various disarmament endeavours outside the framework of the Conference on Disarmament. The gracious and even-handed style with which he performed his duties in the Ad Hoc Group of the States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention, as Friend of the Chair for Compliance Measures, has earned him well-deserved respect.

I am certain that I speak for us all when I say that we are going to miss him and I wish him and his family every happiness and personal success in their future undertakings.

I now call on the representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Ambassador Ian Soutar.

Mr. SOUTAR (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): Mr. President, may I first of all thank you for your good wishes and may I reciprocate by assuring you of my delegation's continuing support for the remainder of your presidency.

Now, Mr. President, I realize that all my colleagues are anxious to proceed to the further elaboration of our annual report to the United Nations General Assembly, but I nonetheless seek their indulgence to make a few personal remarks as I approach the conclusion of my tour in Geneva. I shall certainly stay within the guidelines suggested by our former colleague, Frank Majoor - no more than a page for each of the four years I have been here.

Four years is the normal tour for a British ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament - although I note in passing, and somewhat enviously, that my two immediate predecessors were each fortunate enough to remain in Geneva for rather longer - and I must say that those four years have slipped away very rapidly indeed. I am grateful to my Government for having given me the chance to serve them here in Geneva, and to appreciate the pleasures of this beautiful region, not to mention the attractions of "La France voisine". But most of all I am grateful for the opportunity of working alongside my colleagues here at the Conference on Disarmament. It is fashionable to deprecate the notion that the Conference on Disarmament is a

(Mr. Soutar, United Kingdom)

club, but I shall distance myself from Groucho Marx, who once famously said that he did not want to belong to any club that would accept him as a member: on the contrary I have enjoyed my membership of this particular club. If one leaves aside the connotations of elitism, or exclusivity attached to the social side of a club, the underlying definition of a club is an association dedicated to the pursuit of a particular interest or activity - which is precisely what we are engaged in: the pursuit of multilateral disarmament measures.

I would be misleading the Conference if I tried to conceal my disappointment that the four years of my posting to Geneva have coincided with a very fallow period as far as the work of the Conference is concerned. I am particularly disappointed that the personal effort I invested in educating myself in the technology of fissile material production has borne no practical rewards during my time at the Conference. Ah well, such is life. Perhaps when I retire I can supplement my pension by selling my acquired knowledge to the highest bidder!

More seriously, Mr. President, even if, as I say, I regret the failure of the Conference to undertake substantive work during my time here, I do derive some modest satisfaction from having played a small part, alongside others, in keeping the engine of our vehicle well oiled and ticking over against the day when, as we all hope, it will be possible once more to step on the accelerator. I was particularly honoured to have been able to serve the Conference as President, as you are now doing, Sir, and like you, to preside over the adoption of the annual report.

At that time, and indeed throughout my time in Geneva, I have learned many things about many people, and not a little about myself.

The first of these is transparency. We have talked a lot about transparency in armaments - but a lot of what we do here is about transparency in relationships. An English Ambassador - and I mean an English Ambassador - once said "An ambassador is an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country." Even if that were true in the seventeenth century, it is not true in the twenty-first, and certainly not true in the multilateral context. Transparency, and with it, credibility and predictability, is what our business here should be all about.

And the corollary of transparency is patience. I am of course not the first diplomat nor the last to have discovered that - Lord Strang, a former permanent under-secretary at the Foreign Office, said in the 1950s: "Diplomacy is not one of the easiest professions. What it calls for above all things is patience." That certainly has been my experience in Geneva. Patience, a readiness to listen to the other person's point of view - even, or especially if you think that you have heard it all before - and a willingness to keep talking, long after bedtime if need be: these seem to me to be the essential ingredients of such success as we have been able to register.

And, finally, Geneva has amply confirmed to me the wisdom of a distinguished French Ambassador, de Callières, who wrote one of the first treatises on diplomacy in the eighteenth century. He wrote: "An ambassador must be liberal and magnificent, but with judgement and design, and his magnificence should be reflected in his suite. His table should be served neatly,

(Mr. Soutar, United Kingdom)

plentifully and with taste. He should give frequent entertainments and parties. A good table is the best and easiest way of keeping himself well informed. The natural effect of good eating and drinking is the inauguration of friendship and the creation of familiarity, and when people are a trifle warmed by wine they often disclose secrets of importance."

I am sure that colleagues would agree that our French colleague has faithfully followed the precepts of his distinguished predecessor. Nor indeed is he alone in that.

Mr. President, it will be evident, I think, that I leave Geneva with mixed feelings. Both personally and professionally there is still so much that I feel I could have done, but my Government has decided that I must move on. I should like to take this opportunity of thanking colleagues, past and present, for the friendship and advice, and above all good company, which they have bestowed on me over the past four years. I should like to wish them all the best for their future endeavours, both here and in their native lands. I cannot fail to thank Director-General Petrovsky, Deputy Secretary-General Román-Morey and the secretariat staff for their professional assistance. And last but not least the invisible but indispensable interpreters for their unfailing support.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank Ambassador Soutar for his statement and the kind words addressed to the Chair and once again we would like to wish you every success in your new posting.

This concludes the list of speakers for today. Does any delegation wish to take the floor at this stage? I see none, therefore this concludes our business for today.

As I mentioned earlier, we shall convene in 10 minutes' time in an informal plenary, to continue consideration of the draft annual report. As usual this meeting will be open only to member States of the Conference and to observer States. The next and probably last plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 13 September 2001, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.